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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DURBAN 000059

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SUBJECT: BUTHELEZI PREACHES MORE OF THE SAME AT IFP ANNUAL  
CONFERENCE

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CLASSIFIED BY: Eugene S. Young, Consul General.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) held its 32nd Annual General Conference from October 12-14 in KwaZulu-Natal. IFP President Mangosuthu Buthelezi presided over the conference, which was attended by over 3,000 delegates. Buthelezi criticized the ANC-led government, and detailed his own party's problems, but did little to detail a strategy for the 2009 elections. A controversy surrounding calls for the establishment of an IFP Deputy President dominated the conference. Buthelezi announced that he would step down at the end of his term in 2009 following general elections. He would likely stay, however, for another term if the party asked him to, and should his health hold up, we believe the party will do so. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) CG and Pol/EconOff attended the Inkatha Freedom Party's (IFP) 32nd Annual General Conference from October 12-14 in Ulundi in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). IFP President Mangosuthu Buthelezi presided over the conference, which was attended by over 3,000 delegates. No agenda was released prior to the start of the conference, with the understanding that Buthelezi had the agenda stored "in his head." The conference started three hours late following a prolonged emergency meeting of the National Executive Committee. Buthelezi called the meeting to deal with rumors that the IFP Youth Brigade wished to create the position of Deputy President, which is not currently called for in the party's constitution, and in order to assist in clarifying the IFP succession process.

LEAN, MEAN, ELECTION FIGHTING MACHINE?

¶3. (C) The theme of this year's conference was "Each One's Role in a Crisis and the Forthcoming Elections." Buthelezi detailed in an hour-long speech problems with the ANC-led government. Buthelezi proclaimed that "corruption has never been as rampant," that pro-IFP civil servants have been "purged," and that the ANC "has placed the last nail in the coffin of provincial autonomy." Buthelezi also mentioned the suspension of Vusi Pikoli, Director of the National Prosecuting Authority, as an example of the "mess" in the criminal justice system. He also cited crime, HIV/AIDS, unemployment, and poverty as key issues which the ANC has failed to address. Buthelezi then described many of the IFP's faults that had led to the loss of support over the past several years. Buthelezi, however, offered few suggestions as to how the party could move forward

with a coordinated and successful campaign for the 2009 elections. Instead, he merely proclaimed that "this is the time to become a lean, mean and effective election fighting machine." Yet when the delegates broke into closed sessions, only one of eleven groups was told to focus on the formulation of a strategy to win back voters.

¶4. (C) While the recent crossing of four ANC members to the IFP in two KZN municipalities (see Reftel) has boosted party confidence, the short-lived effects of this will be outweighed by the party's substantial problems. The IFP continues to fail to attract broad-based support beyond its primary constituents, rural Zulus, and in fact has steadily lost ground to the ANC even among this core constituency. Further, since the party lost the province in 2004, funding sources have continued to decline. As the ANC now controls the provincial government, there is little incentive for private business to donate to other parties. The IFP states that business leaders fear that they will lose government contracts if they are publicly seen to be IFP supporters.

#### CONTROVERSY OVER CALLS FOR DEPUTY PRESIDENT

¶5. (C) Prior to the conference, there were widespread media reports that dissidents within the IFP would call for the establishment of a Deputy President, requiring an amendment to the party's constitution. Reportedly, these dissidents sought to push forward potential candidates to succeed Buthelezi through this mechanism. Any speculation concerning the creation of a Deputy President was quickly squashed when the conference finally opened. The three leaders most likely to take over from Buthelezi - Secretary General Reverend Musa Zondi, National Chairperson Zanele Magwaza-Msibi, and National Organizer Albert Mncwango - distanced themselves from any such move in individual speeches. All three pledged allegiance to Buthelezi if he were to stand again for another term of office. Acting IFP Young Brigade Leader Pat Lebenya-Ntanzu also delivered a statement denying claims that the Youth Brigade engaged in any formal or informal discussion about a Deputy President.

¶6. (C) Buthelezi cautioned that too many members of his party

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are "concerned about leadership issues, and wonder who will be succeeding" him, but noted that this will occur only when this "Conference tells me that it is time to retire, or when my term expires, or when I get run over by the proverbial bus." Buthelezi delivered the final blow to any Deputy President aspirants, declaring that "I lead my party. I do not follow it! This weekend is not an elective conference."

¶7. (C) Professor Christian Msimang, Chairperson of the Political Oversight Committee, confided to Pol/EconOff on October 13 that there had been "too much fighting" amongst party leaders over "issues of leadership." Although other party leaders present at the conference denied any such leadership struggles, Buthelezi publicly confirmed infighting in his address, stating that he no longer wants "to hear about our leaders promoting themselves with our existing constituencies or undermining other leaders." Despite the ongoing debate, Secretary General Reverend Zondi told CG that there is no succession process. When Buthelezi departs the Presidency, the National Chairperson will be interim President until an election is called to decide the next leader.

BUTHELEZI - NOT YET "RUN OVER BY THE PROVERBIAL BUS"

¶8. (C) At 79 years old, an energetic Buthelezi presided over the conference until 1:00 AM on the first evening. The following morning, he delivered his Presidential Address in two languages, English and isiZulu, and stood during a Sotho translation. After standing on his feet for three continuous hours, he still appeared the picture of perfect health. Zondi also confirmed that Buthelezi was "fit as a fiddle."

¶9. (C) On the final day of the conference, Buthelezi announced that he would step down from the post of President after the

expiration of his term in 2009. He noted repeatedly throughout the conference, however, that he had previously offered his resignation in 2004 and 2006, but was "begged" each time by the party to stand for another term.

¶10. (C) In many respects, Buthelezi is the sole voice of the IFP. Whether the IFP will survive following his retirement or death is unclear. As he is also the traditional Prime Minister of the Zulu Kingdom, he has also historically embodied the spirit of Zulu nationalism. Despite appearing regularly with ANC Deputy President Jacob Zuma at events around KZN, Buthelezi and the IFP have felt threatened recently by Zuma's emergence as a popular Zulu leader.

#### RHETORIC OF A SLOWLY DYING PARTY

¶11. (C) Buthelezi seemed to indicate during the conference that he was aware that his party was slowly fizzling out, noting that the IFP is "knocked down, but not knocked out." Buthelezi repeatedly stated that the IFP was working to regain control of KZN, but cautioned that "with the resources of State which are being used extensively already to campaign for the 2009 elections by the ANC in the Province, this may be considered a tall order."

¶12. (C) Buthelezi may have unwittingly predicted the fate of the party in his opening remarks, stating that the IFP's "demise has been predicted many times, but we have prevailed and we will continue to prevail. Politics, in the end, is a numbers game. We can have the most finely crafted slogans and policies, but without votes, we are consigned to irrelevance, and ultimately, oblivion."

¶13. (C) COMMENT: For now, the IFP remains a viable voice of opposition in KZN in spite of declining power and resources. With significant funding problems and no clear election strategy it is unlikely that the IFP will win back KZN from the ANC. There is no indication, however, that the party would survive without charismatic leader Buthelezi at the helm. While Buthelezi announced that he would step down in 2009, he would likely stay on once again if the party requested him to stay for another term. Barring a serious deterioration in his health, we believe he will be "asked" to stay on by the party. Even so, the party's refusal to discuss a succession strategy is short-sighted given Buthelezi's age. However, Buthelezi may believe (and may be correct) that there is currently no clear successor amongst the party's top leaders. Ironically, it is Buthelezi's own leadership that has brought the IFP to this point where he is, in fact, the indispensable man. Buthelezi's unwillingness to yield authority or to groom successors over the years has driven from the party any leaders who could successfully transition the IFP into a new era. As a result,

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the party is left with weak senior leaders with little national or provincial recognition, whose assumption of power would only accelerate the decline of the party. END COMMENT.  
YOUNG